

## Foreign Affairs - MERC - Statements

### Middle East Regional Cooperation Program December 10, 1987

#### Congressional Record

By Henry A. Waxman

Mr. Waxman: Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3100, the International Security and Development Cooperation Act of 1987. This important legislation addresses many urgent needs, and includes continued support for the Middle East Regional Cooperation program.

The Middle East Regional Cooperation program, which sponsors joint scientific projects with Egyptian, Israeli, and American scientists and institutions, would receive at least \$5 million for fiscal years 1988 and 1989 under H.R. 3100. This program began with an amendment I offered to the 1980 foreign aid authorization bill and has quietly grown into an outstanding success. The program's development -- in the face of frequent strains in the Israeli-Egyptian relationship -- exemplifies the promise of joint technical projects in eroding deep-seated mistrust and hostility between peoples.

The major projects in this program--in epidemiology, oceanography, and arid zone agriculture -- have produced impressive scientific results. The epidemiology project, for instance, was directly responsible for quelling an outbreak of leishmaniasis in Egypt in 1982. And one of the arid lands projects has developed a strain of tomatoes that grows in the brackish, saline water so common to the region. Another has engineered a high-protein strain of fodder for sheep and goats that thrives on dryer land than any previously known strain.

In addition to these concrete achievements, the Middle East Regional Cooperation Program has had a major impact on intangible relations between Israelis and Egyptians. After 30 years of complete scientific isolation, over 1000 Egyptian and Israeli scientists have now begun working together and are developing close personal relationships. This is the kind of progress on which real peace is founded -- progress which, unlike a peace treaty, can never be subverted or abrogated.

The Middle East Regional Cooperation program is currently funded by economic support funds from AID's Asia/Near East Regional Account. Section 603 of H.R. 3100 continues to support the program and, for the first time, would specifically earmark dollars to ensure an adequate and uninterrupted flow of funds.

The United States' investment in Middle East peace has made Egypt and Israel our largest single foreign aid priority. Yet the Middle East Regional Cooperation program is the only component of our aid to two countries aimed at building a long-term foundation for peace through engendering personal and institutional relationships. In fact, the cooperation program's funding accounts for less than one tenth of 1 percent of the combined \$5 billion Israeli/Egyptian foreign aid package.

Both the scientific gains and impressive progress in peaceful cooperation make the Middle East Regional Cooperation program one of our most valuable and productive foreign aid efforts. I urge all my colleagues to join me in supporting this worthy program.